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ABSTRACT

"New Things Considered" reports on emerging trends and issues in education to policymakers and participants in SEDL-SCAN, an emerging issues tracking system being pilot tested by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory's Policy Information Service and the State of New Mexico. This issue begins with a report on the reactions of educators to Channel One, a daily educational news and current events program which includes 2 minutes of advertising in each 12-minute program. Schools which sign a 3-year contract to have their students watch the program receive in return free satellite and television equipment. The current controversy arises from the inclusion of advertising, even though the commercials are restricted to acceptable products. Many national educational groups have condemned the programs, and they have been banned by several state boards of education. SEDL-SCAN analysts agree that students need to develop an interest in news and current events, but they warn that the lure of "free gifts" may result in the exploitation of school children. This report concludes with the observations that the commercials could be used in teaching students to analyze advertising and that alternative news programs without commercials are being endorsed by a number of groups. This issue also includes a brief report on the Las Cruces Public Schools Environmental Scanning System and summaries of noteworthy trends, events, and technological developments related to education. (DB)

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Channel One: Are Schools Trading Captive Student Audiences for Free Equipment?

New Things Considered: Trends and Issues In Education

Number 5
July, 1990
SEDL

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New Things Considered
Trends and Issues in Education

CONTENTS

• **CHANNEL ONE**
On *The Horizon*:
  • **Watching TV while studying**
  • **Changing the conditions of government work**
  • **The incredible shrinking machine**
  • **INFANT robot teaches itself**
  • **Toward the living computer**
  • **Recreating extinct animal genes**
  • **High school students get a jump on college**
  • **The effects of technology on U.S. and Russian relations**

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CHANNEL ONE:
Are Schools Trading Captive Student Audiences for Free Equipment?

Targeting the need for educational news programming, Whittle Communications, a for-profit organization, has launched an extensive effort to provide such programming along with free satellite and television equipment to "cash-starved" schools around the country. In return for signing a three-year agreement to have students watch a daily news and current events program, a participating school receives one satellite dish, two videocassette recorders, and a 19-inch television monitor for every classroom. The schools record the national broadcast and then play the videotaped show during the school day. Teachers may use the equipment in any way they wish as long as they remain under contract to show the program and abide by Whittle's rules.

The premier Channel One show in March included fast-paced, high interest segments about Eastern Europe, Japanese schools in America, the U.S. trade deficit, and a 17-year-old who tried to windsurf from Cuba to Miami, according to an *Austin American-Statesman* report. One assistant superintendent thought that "the graphics were phenomenal." The program itself does not appear to be a cause for concern; however, every twelve minute broadcast comes with two minutes of advertising, or four 30-second commercials, which give rise to considerable controversy.

Company Chairman Christopher Whittle has promised that there will be no advertising for alcohol, cigarettes, contraceptives, religious institutions, or political campaigns. However, virtually every major national educational group has condemned the venture, claiming that the commercial aspects of the program are tantamount to "selling-out" America's school children. Such concerns convinced the New York State Board of Regents to ban the program outright; California officials voted to reduce state aid to schools for the time spent showing commercials to students; and, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development has urged school officials to examine business involvement in education more critically and to review business-sponsored teaching materials and incentive programs for their educational value.

After 100 schools had already signed contracts with Whittle, the North Carolina state board of education attempted to prohibit any more districts from signing and to void contracts already signed. While the board's initial efforts were overturned in court (*Education Week*, March 14, 1990), it was successful in imposing a three-year restriction on all such pre-existing contracts and in stipulating that districts may not include the 12-minute program in the regular 5 1/2-hour school day (*Education Week*, May 16, 1990). Similarly, the Kentucky Board of Education has approved a resolution barring school districts in that

About SEDL•SCAN

ED-AIDE, The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory's policy information service, and the State of New Mexico are pilot testing SEDL•SCAN, an emerging issues tracking system. Similar to the systems used by industry and government for early identification of important issues, SEDL•SCAN systematically scans and analyzes a broad spectrum of information.

New Things Considered reports the emerging trends and issues to policymakers and SEDL•SCAN participants. Other SEDL•SCAN and **ED-AIDE** publications include *Insights*, issue briefs, trends analyses, and reports developed on request.

SEDL•SCAN activities include quarterly meetings of the analysis committee, an annual regional conference focusing on an issue identified by the analysts, round table forums on selected issues, and technical assistance for educational agencies and organizations.

state from signing contracts with Whittle Communications' Education Network to show Channel One.

To appease criticism, Whittle Communication has provided a $900,000 grant to the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research to study the impact of Channel One on student learning over the next three years, according to an *Education Week* article. Unfortunately, this study will not monitor the impact of the commercials on students.

The Analysts' Concerns

The members of the New Mexico SEDL•SCAN analysis committee agree that students need to develop an interest in news and current events. However, they feel that school officials must exercise control over commercial interests that use the lure of "free" gifts of technology in order to avoid exploitation of "a captive audience" of school children.

Questioning the idea that students can disassociate from television advertising, the analysts fear that once commercial television finds a home in the classroom, schools will begin to exchange other advertising for needed supplies and equipment. Pointing to the growing use of commercially produced educational posters, and the use of commercial display cases in schools, analysts anticipate a growing trend. Asked one analyst, "Once you sell your students, where do you stop?"

On the other hand, analysts believe that students are bombarded by commercials in every television show they watch at home, and the Whittle program commercials are excellent springboards to a discussion of advertising in general. If the purpose of the program is to teach students about today's events and issues, then the commercials are instructional materials just like the Channel One show itself. Some analysts think the need to help students analyze advertising is becoming increasingly important, and it is appropriate to use the Channel One commercials along with the ads found in newspapers, magazines, and billboards to teach students how to evaluate them.

Implications

A number of groups have begun to endorse alternative news and current events programs, specifically a commercial-free news show offered to schools by Turner Broadcasting Systems' *CNN Newsroom*, Public Broadcasting Systems' *The McNeil-Lehrer Report*, and National Public Radio's *All Things Considered*. Like Whittle's approach, these programs could be taped and played during class time. Reception of these programs does not require satellite dishes in most locations; however, some schools will still have to acquire recording and replaying equipment.

Abstracts: 2:0290; 55:0290

SEDL•SCAN Welcomes
The Las Cruces Public Schools Environmental Scanning System

In concluding its one-year New Mexico pilot test of SEDL•SCAN, an environmental scanning system designed for early issue identification and tracking, the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory has offered technical assistance to the educational agencies, organizations, and associations interested in implementing a similar state-based system. Under the leadership of the Honorable J. Paul Taylor, New Mexico state representative and SEDL board member, the Las Cruces Public Schools is taking SEDL up on its offer.

In evaluating the utility of the SEDL•SCAN effort, the members of the pilot system emphasized the benefits of their participation in SEDL•SCAN, saying the process had become an integral part of "the way we do business," and "very applicable to what we do in state government." They asked that SEDL assist with development of a state-based environmental scanning system by developing information materials, providing training for system participants, and working with interested organizations to explore funding sources.

SEDL will continue to provide support until the end of its current REL contract period, November 30, 1990. For more information about environmental scanning systems, the SEDL•SCAN system and its products, or the Las Cruces system, contact Magdalena Rood at (512) 476-6861.

ON THE HORIZON

Watching TV while studying—an educational opportunity? The idea is not new—Juanita is watching television while she is doing her homework. The technology, however, is. Juanita's computer displays both her homework and the TV program on the same screen at the same time. Aapps Corporation recently announced the development of an add-on circuit board that allows the Macintosh computer to receive programs from cable TV and display them in a small window on the screen while the user works with a software application. Merging computer technology with television opens up many new potential applications for education. In the near future, Juanita could be watching an instructional documentary on videotape to research her earth science paper while she is writing it.

Changing the conditions of government work. The public sector is beginning to respond to the national trend toward fitting the job to the employee rather than fitting the employee to the job. Mirroring the experiences of the private sector, Milwaukee is exploring a number of innovations that will eventually lead to a redefined workplace. Milwaukee's city and county agencies provide tuition subsidies for workers to keep abreast in their fields, have offered job sharing and four-day weeks for more than a decade, and recently implemented unpaid parental leave for new fathers as well as mothers. Under consideration are proposals for day- and child-care programs. While these programs are expensive, and difficult to apply to tightly structured jobs like those of the police and firefighters, county executive David Schulz feels the programs work well for "thousands of office employees."

The incredible shrinking machine. Research labs across the country are using variations of the photolithographic techniques of integrated micro-chip production to develop tiny motors, sensors, gears, and saws that are no larger than a grain of sand. The National Science Foundation has identified a number of immediate uses; for example, buzz saws for use by surgeons in micro-surgery and implanted sensors to monitor body functions. Other immediate applications may produce miniature tape recorders, camcorders, and computers.

INFANT robot teaches itself. Scientist Michael Kuperstein has patented INFANT, a robot modeled on the way a human baby learns motor skills. INFANT, an acronym for Interactive Networks Functioning on Adaptive Neural Topographies, develops a sense of spatial relationships which enables it to maneuver through a changing environment and perform functions that are not in any given position or location.

Toward the living computer. Using genetic engineering to make protein molecules that collectively act as transistors or other electronic devices, University of Illinois researchers believe they will eventually be able to emulate the human brain. The advantages of these biochips are that they are smaller than conventional semiconductor chips, do not generate as much heat, allow for parallel processing of information, and could be produced with specific senses to perform particular tasks. A biological sensor capable of smelling or tasting may be available within five years.

Recreating extinct animal genes. If the genetic information is available, a machine called the DNA synthesizer will allow us to recreate an animal that no longer exists, according to Robert J. Wall of the Agricultural Research Service. In a related development, newly discovered dinosaur bones from Arctic Alaska may allow scientists to recreate dinosaurs some 65 million years after they perished because the bones never fossilized. Because they were frozen with the onset of the ice age and the bones retained their original amino acid constitution, they may still have some of their DNA, which would allow scientists to regenerate a dinosaur molecule.

New Things Considered reports on the activities of SEDL•SCAN, a component of ED-AIDE, the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory's Policy Information Service. All information referenced in this publication is available upon request. For more information contact Magdalena Rood or Joyce Pollard, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 211 E. 7th Street, Austin, Texas, 78701, (512) 476-6861, Fax (512) 476-2286.

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High school students get a jump on college. The Texas Academy of Mathematics and Science was created by the state legislature to nudge bright students who might otherwise be bored with their school work toward careers in mathematics and science. According to a *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, the program is thought to be the first in the country where students can simultaneously finish their last two years of high school and the first two years of college. Academy students attend classes at the University of North Texas and live in dormitories, where they have to comply with an 11 p.m. curfew and other minor restrictions.

The effects of technology on U.S. and Russian relations. Computer industry watcher John C. Dvorak notes that there is a scarcity of personal computers in Russia, which is driving prices on the black market very high and making new computer owners frequent targets for burglary. In Russia even highly skilled computer programmers are paid very little, making them an attractive labor pool for American companies who are tapping this low-wage work force to develop complex compilers and programs. These products are then sold at the same price as products developed in the West.

The Analysts

The Analysis Committee of the New Mexico SEDL•SCAN system met in Albuquerque on February 27, 1990. The participants were:

» Helen Harriger, New Mexico Phi Delta Kappa
» Susan Holderness, New Mexico Research & Study Council
» Tamra Ivy, New Mexico Community Education Association
» Bryan McOlash, Legislative Education Study Council
» Jerry Melders, Las Cruces School District
» John Mitchell, New Mexico Federation of Teachers
» Abad Sandoval, Los Alamos National Laboratory
» Catherine Smith, New Mexico State Board of Education
» Francis Stevens, Las Cruces School District
» John Thorpe, State Budget Division, Governor's Office
» Jo Anne Young, Cobre School District.

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